



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE GREAT ILLUSION ABOUT GERMANY

BY F. V. KEYS

OF all the features of the Great War that make it a war without precedent and without parallel in history, none is so fraught with incalculable consequences to the future of civilization as the fact that this is literally a war not of armies, nor of governments, but of entire peoples. There is no other feature of the struggle which it is of such supreme and present importance for all who hope for a stable peace to bear in mind and attempt to understand. For at this hour the Power that precipitated war at the moment of her own choosing is attempting to precipitate peace, also at the moment of her choice.

Now this Power is the very one that is responsible for the fact that this is a war of whole nations—this Power which, at the very outset of hostilities, mobilized not only every human and every material resource of her people, but also every inherited ideal and loyalty, every future hope and aspiration, of the nation; which deliberately, for the first time in history, has made a by-word of culture, by betraying it into the service of ferocious military aggression. The solidarity of the German nation, first in evolving and next in maintaining this condition of affairs, is such as to have succeeded in imposing a similar solidarity on each successive opponent as these entered the field against her. But there is the gravest danger of the democratic peoples forgetting that the organization they uneasily submit to, as a necessary measure in a moment of national peril, represents the settled habit and accepted mode of German thought and action throughout the whole of the history of the German Empire, and for centuries in the case of the dominant partner in that empire, Prussia.

Just as we see ourselves approaching an external resem-

blance to the German people, in that we too are perforce assuming the aspect of an armed camp, there is the danger that we shall project into our view of German mentality some of the rooted aspects of our own: the taking for granted that government expresses the will of the people, that it is responsible to the people; our incapacity to consider whole classes of our fellows as compounded of different clay, as by birth endowed with social and political privileges beyond ourselves; our oblivion of the existence of a State Church and the enormous weight of its combined ecclesiastical and political prestige in enforcing its policies in the education of youth and in controlling the political and social fortunes of individuals. No consideration of the German nation that fails to face the enormous gulf that separates them from modern democracies in the only province that counts here, the province of political thinking, will serve any purposes save those of the modern scientific feudalism entrenched less strongly in the soil of its opponents than in the brain and the very blood of its own people, whether they belong to the class that issues or the mass that takes orders. It is in the interest of these latter, as it is in the interest, finally, of even the former, that we who have evolved another philosophy and another practice of government, should see the German people as they really are politically—not as our ignorance, or a shallow idealism, or self-delusion, would wish them to be.

Every appeal to the German people over the heads of its leaders, every attempt to impress it with the good faith and disinterestedness of its opponents in this war, every assurance that we are fighting, not for the extermination of the German people but for their right to develop their great virtues and manifest genius in the humane forms ensured alone under the influence of free institutions, pre-supposes in Germany the existence of at least a kernel of the sort of thought which we describe by the phrase "public opinion." But no one who has been long and intimately familiar with the inside of German institutions, with the ways of thinking in typical German circles, whether liberal or conservative so-called, with the whole political atmosphere breathed by radical or reactionary within the borders of the German Empire, can hesitate to say that *there never has been in Germany any such thing as public opinion.*

In the summer of 1912 I happened to hear an address

made before the *Fraueninteressenverein* of Munich by a German who had just returned from a visit to this country. He was representative of the most liberal thought in the intellectual and artistic circles of South Germany, and a vein of Anglo-Saxon blood in his descent made him an excellent observer. His hosts and guides in his journey across this continent were among the leaders of progressive ideas in various fields of American social endeavor. In reporting his impressions of America, he said that, to a German, the most striking and novel thing in this country was the element which invariably entered into all discussion, and which people called "public opinion." He had asked at first what party it represented. He was told it represented no one party; that it was outside of all parties, that it constituted, in fact, the court of appeal from party. Everywhere he went, among all kinds of people, he heard the phrase, and everywhere it was used unquestioningly as indicating that which, in the last analysis, everything must be referred to, and, in the last decision, judged by. It could not be likened or even compared to any German arbiter of opinion, to any of the existing German hierarchies, whether military or courtly or ecclesiastical or political. For while remaining always unidentified with party opinion, this public opinion on occasion drew on the ranks of all parties, who appeared to meet on a plane of thought and purpose where party lines disappeared and where the broader distinctions of right and wrong divided men into opposing groups. In other words, what was recognized by Americans as the sovereign power in all matters of debate, was apparently none other than the judging power lodged in the moral responsibility of the people at large, a judging power invoked to decide public questions and pass sentence on public officers on a basis of the plain human issues involved, and in the large interests of humanity itself. Now this, he said, it was almost impossible to make a German audience understand. For it meant a national psychology different not so much in degree as in kind. For in Germany, there were always just two bodies of opinion on any and every matter: there was the Government, and there was the opposition. No one really got outside of these two categories.

The truth of this presentation of the case, on the German side, the events of the war have proved almost past belief. We have seen that the group of men which in every

country is assumed to be vowed to a strict observance of ascertained fact, the scientists, in Germany distinguished themselves by issuing to the world a document denying flagrant facts on the sole authority of their word, so that the famous *Es Ist Nicht Wahr* throws into the shade all the prerogatives claimed by the bulls issued over the signature of papal infallibility. Meanwhile, the intellectual leaders of all schools, not excluding those that had coquetted with the political "left" and had sedulously followed the lead of æsthetic and literary innovators in Paris and London, closed up their ranks with the Government, and left nothing unsaid that would fan the belief of the masses that this was a holy war in defense of German culture itself. And the opposition? It did precisely the same.

The reason for this is plain, and of the utmost moment for us in America to bear in mind whenever and wherever the idea of a negotiated peace with Germany, as she now stands, is put forward.

Why is it so impossible for the German mind to apprehend and understand that which we mean by "public opinion"? For the reason that the German nation has always been, psychologically, on a war footing. Her mentality has been, in a quite literal sense, the mentality of an army. And an army is the one place where there can be no public opinion. An army, indeed, is allowed its recreation, when off duty. Nor is the censorship strict in regard to the range and license permitted to those who furnish its recreation, provided these do not infringe upon the authority of the army discipline. Many foreigners, especially Anglo-Saxons, were misled into believing in the emancipated political state of German opinion by the extreme freedom with which the German novel and particularly the German stage treated all social traditions and conventions, especially those pertaining to sex. The grossness of the extremely clever German caricaturists was indicative of a public graduated, in the highest as in the meanest of its members, from the barracks. Not alone the military barracks, but the educational ones, where during a long and rigidly enforced attendance the German mind was trained in the two essentials of an army, absolute reliance on the officers and unremitting apprehension of the near presence and treachery of the foe. The discipline of the class-room was in no way behind that of the army, for which it prepared and shaped the whole youth

of the country. And from the authority of the schoolmaster there was as little appeal as from the authority of the commanding officer.

Nothing speaks so eloquently of the intolerable interlocking of parental and school authority in Germany as the steadily rising toll of child suicide, expected and occurring yearly with the return of the Easter promotions in the schools. Where the results of an examination were responsible for making or unmaking a career, the burden upon the pupil was beyond the strength of all those not capable of assimilating an army drill, and caught between the school and a parent trained to know better than to connive by sympathy at the undermining of authority. The German gymnasiast, of an age corresponding to that of our high-school boys, presented a compound of solid learning and extraordinary academic maturity, with a feudal political mentality that could be described intelligibly to an Anglo-Saxon only by the term "arrested political development." But the same youth might show, if living in one of the larger centers, a literary and dramatic and artistic taste formed on the best classics and the most advanced modern works in these provinces. And for that side of him, too, the Government was responsible, tightening its grip on his loyalty by its insistence in making him a creature of a masterful power and efficiency in every domain, and never letting him stray for a moment beyond its watchful attentiveness to his needs. Every schoolboy in Germany was made to feel himself the future defender of not only the boundaries but of the genius of his country against an obviously inferior and covertly jealous world. How deeply the German nature took the mould thus imposed, the world has seen.

And what of the "opposition"? What, under the disguise of mere name, of mere profession, and of merely domestic policies, does the "opposition" in the German nation signify today to the enemies of autocracy and the friends of democracy in the ranks of the Allies? Are they justified by the history and temper of that "opposition" in regarding it as a possible purchase on the German people in the interest of an internal revolutionary movement against the present German Government?

First, as to its history. There are here two capital points to be noted. They can only be indicated, but their far-reaching effects will occur to every student or thinker

on the subject of those practical politics that make, and do not only criticise, history. The first point is, the essentially exclusive pre-occupation of the German Socialists in the Reichstag with questions and measures of purely domestic policy, the pouring of their whole energy into the attempt to push forward the enfranchisement of the laboring classes, the re-distribution of electoral districts, nationalization or municipalization of transport and commodities, and the general insurance measures for the workers. In all this, neither the dangers nor the responsibilities attaching to foreign policies were in the minds of the Socialist leaders, still less on their programme for the education of the masses. This was to a certain extent inevitable. The German nation as a whole was absorbed, until Bismarck fell, in consolidating the newly raised structure of the German Empire, itself the creature of a military annexationist policy, which crowned its Emperor at Versailles, and proceeded to build itself up internally by turning into its commerce and industry the proceeds of the enormous indemnity imposed on France, by exploiting scientifically the two rich annexed provinces and expropriating their French inhabitants to make room for German colonists.

It was under this régime that the present Reichstag Socialist party was born. The master of this régime, Bismarck, was the parliamentary trainer of the first and greatest of the Socialist leaders, August Bebel, who applauds, in his *Memoirs*, the openness with which the Chancellor conducted his side of the argument. But the fight Bebel fought with Bismarck was a fight within the Empire only. That the German masses should be satisfied with this as the one and only necessary struggle, was merely the natural result of their complete inexperience in all government, as it was also the foregone conclusion from the very nature of the Reichstag itself, permitted to exist only as a place where the measures designed by the Government might previously be submitted to public debate, and thus furnish to the Government reliable proof of the condition of parties, by which it could be safely guided as to time and occasion for furthering its own ends. But for us at the present time it is momentous to remember that during the period when the German Socialist party was still virgin—as yet unwedded to Blacks or Blues for the purpose of obtaining its own domestic ends—it was breathing an air infected with the

triumph of aggressive military imperialism. Its leaders had so little inborn political consciousness as practically to ignore the whole question of German foreign policy in their political education of their rank and file, contenting themselves with repeating the party slogan that all armies were merely the weapon of capitalism against the home laboring class. These leaders, nevertheless, had in their own lifetime seen the German army used as the effective tool of territorial expansion against Denmark in 1864, against Austria in 1866, against France in 1870. The territorial gains in the Austrian War were slight, but the psychological gains to Prussian imperialism were enormous. The victory of Sadowa eliminated Austria as a possible leader of the already projected German Empire, and left Prussia, *on the strength of her victorious arms*, the undisputed head of that federation, to be shaped according to the ideal of an undiluted Teutonic race. And during the long period following the War of 1870, these same Socialist leaders saw that the tool which determined and achieved the aims of German foreign policy, the army, was being steadily increased in respect of size, specialization of arms, and the utmost scientific efficiency; and to this army, after the Emperor had launched a new world policy of imperialism in his declaration that "the future of Germany lies upon the seas," there was added a navy that set out to surpass that of the Power whose navy was her sole arm. Far from making it their main concern to warn the German masses against the avowed uses to which these preparations pointed, the Socialists used the Government's policy of military and naval expansion as a means of bargaining with it for certain domestic reforms of their own. Politically in their nonage, bred up not on political experience but on a political theory that dismissed all questions of foreign policy as negligible, as superseded by a policy professing to align mankind on other than national lines, the German Socialist party constituted an absolutely unreliable factor in determining the peace of Europe.

The second point to be noted in the history of the party, is that it has been, in a vital sense, an opposition on paper only. It has flourished hitherto under a constitution that foredoomed it never to come into actual power, never to be committed to the enactment of its own policies, in the face of the opposition of other parties, never even to see those measures which it fathered in debate put through except

with the consent and assistance of the Government or of one of the reactionary groups. Invariably this consent was bought with an off-setting gain on the imperialistic side. With this as the actual process of Socialist policy, there lay in the Socialist internationalist formula—in the speeches reported abroad as flung at the head of the Government by Socialist debaters—the gravest danger to the cause of peaceful evolution toward democracy throughout the world. The inveterate tendency of human nature, let alone party leaders, to unpack its heart in words when secure against the practical consequences of those words and assured that it shall never be called on to be responsible for enacting them, becomes a peculiarly dangerous one when there exist in the responsible parliaments of democratic peoples groups of men who are urged, by their long political history, by their party devotion to party formulæ, and by their native temper, to attach to the utterances of German Socialists and the rumored discontent of the German masses, a meaning and a weight wholly illusory, a meaning so flagrantly disproved today that belief in it would be grotesque were it not so full of sinister implications for the future.

For the temper itself of the German opposition has been from its beginning that of an army within an army. How could it be otherwise? Socialists in Germany have graduated from the same schools, from the same universities, from the same army, as the imperialists. They have lived all their lives in the same mental atmosphere, that of superior and inferior, woman standing as breeder and general servant at the bottom of the scale. On one occasion, when the present writer was remarking to a German Socialist on the absence of any endeavor to promote independent judgment in the ranks of the party, the answer was given in a tone of Teutonic finality: "Here we have to fight an army. To do it, we must adopt the tactics of an army." So that for the mass of the German "opposition," the very school that was pretending to liberate them politically was busy adding another turn to the screw that held them in mental subjection.

A savage intolerance toward any form of revolutionary thought except that endorsed by the party was characteristic of leaders and followers. I have seen a mass-meeting of Socialist workmen deny, on the cue of the chairman, freedom of speech to a fellow workingman because they suspected in him an advocate of syndicalism, and I heard them applaud

with jeers the brutal gesture that sent him reeling from the platform to the floor. Intolerance had been instilled into the thinking of the professed "opposition." From that it was only a step to the doctrine of physical force. German Socialists have been the agents of Prussian imperialism among the "comrades" of every nation. "Imperialists?"—a visiting German Socialist deputy at Geneva was quoted as saying, in an interview with a Swiss party member, in January, 1915—"of course we German Socialists are imperialists. We will conquer Europe with our army, and then socialize it."

To every German the army is the tool of his idea, the instrument of his mission. "The function of the German is to impose organization on mankind," said Ostwald, as a justification of German aggression. As for the temper of the whole German people, it had become such that no possible war that the imperialists could declare but must be regarded by them as a war of defence. An observer of the entrance of the first German troops into Luxembourg said that the most terrifying thing was the expression on the faces of the soldiers. It was that of wild beasts at bay. Their glance flashed ferociously from side to side down every cross-street and alley. They had been told that the French were already in the place, and might spring on them from ambush at any moment. It is an epitome of the teaching and the mental attitude of the German people for forty years, of Prussia for centuries. Where, in these two interlocking phalanxes, with obedience within and fear without as the two watchwords, was there room for public opinion?

Whether there is any other means of breaking up this war-complex than by breaking up the German army, it is for the German people itself, and for it alone, to say and prove. On them, and on them alone, lies the burden of proof. We must accept the word of no one else for them. We have done so once, and that once too often. The United States has spoken at last the word that History has been waiting for ever since the first volley was fired: "We can have no dealings with the present Government of the German Empire." In that word the "Necessity knows no law" of the German Chancellor got its final and logical reply. To act on that word, never to recant it, is the duty of the Republic to mankind, and to Germany.

F. V. KEYS.